Principles of Quality in Social Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Executive Summary of the briefing 'Principles of Quality in Social Services,' published as an output of the 2023 meeting of the European Social Network (ESN)'s Working Group on Quality in Social Services. This is the second of a series of four briefings that summarise the findings of the annual meetings of the working group between 2022-2025.

Read the full briefing for a more comprehensive review of principles underpinning national quality frameworks for social services in different European countries and the Working Group's proposal on the principles that should underpin ESN's vision for a future EU framework on quality in social services.

Why a revamp of the European Voluntary Framework on Quality in Social Services?

Thirteen years after its introduction, the impact of the 2010 EU Voluntary Framework on Quality in Social Services (VFQSS). has been limited. Only three countries (Bulgaria, Estonia and Romania) refer to the VFQSS in its legislation. Several EU Member States do not deem it relevant for their national quality polices. At local and regional levels, where the competence for quality assurance in social services is situated in several EU countries its is mostly unknown. Therefore, ESN puts forward a new proposal which it expects to be more likely to be picked up as designed to be most relevant for social services, with a clearer scope of application.

The framework will be a key reference document for:

- public regulators and quality agencies, which develop new standards
- those who review existing ones in countries, regions and municipalities across Europe.

This Social Services Quality Framework will be based on principles, define standards and include indicators to measure compliance with the standards. This proposal is aligned with the approach taken in the development of existing national social services quality frameworks in European Countries such as in Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Ireland, Romania, United Kingdom.

The Working Group's Proposal for Principles of Quality in Social Services

After initial discussions on 15 principles of quality in 2022, in 2023, the Working Group members put forward a final number of six principles of quality in social services, building a basis for an actionable and effective quality framework.

1. Human Rights based
2. Person-centred
3. Outcomes-oriented
4. Safe
5. Community-based
6. Well-managed

A more extensive description of each of the principles and what it entails can be found below:

1. Human rights-based

Social services provision is based on the respect of people's human rights in line with international and national human rights legislation. A human rights-based approach to quality in social care and support seeks to ensure that the human rights of people using social services are protected, promoted and supported by staff and services. It places an emphasis on protecting and promoting people's rights and respecting their autonomy, privacy, dignity, values, preferences and diversity.

In social care and social services, this means people's right to:

- participate in their care and support,
- fairness in terms of access and delivery of care and support,
- being treated with dignity and respect and not discriminated against for any reason such as age, gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or disability,
- having the freedom to choose and give consent where this is possible,
- being safe from harm and violence,
- and being empowered to have control over one's life, self-manage and be independent.

2. Person-centred

The person is always at the centre of how the service is planned and delivered. The needs of the person are understood by the service provider, and the person is actively involved in planning, delivering and evaluating the care service in a co-production approach. The provider enables the person to define their personal

needs and goals and enables them to take decisions and maintain as much control as possible over their lives.

The person has the freedom to choose the services which best responds to their needs. Services cooperate and work in an integrated manner, ensuring continuous, integrated and comprehensive support for the person across different care settings, services and sectors, including health, education, employment, and social cohesion. The service is accessible, meaning that people can access care in ways that meet their personal circumstances, including physical and digital access. The service is available timely, this means everyone can access the care, support and treatment they need when they need it.

3. Outcomes-oriented

Care and support should be oriented towards measurable outcomes. Services are planned and provided for people to have the best possible outcomes based on their needs and ensuring they have a good quality of life.

Attaining a good quality of life for the person in care or support according to objective and subjective indicators should be a key marker of quality in social services provision. The intended outcomes of social services are defined and measured jointly with the person.

4. Safe

Service users are safeguarded from the risk of harm, neglect or abuse. Safety is a priority for everyone and leaders embed a culture of openness and collaboration. People are always safe and protected from bullying, harassment, avoidable harm, neglect, abuse and discrimination. Their liberty is protected where this is in their best interests and in line with legislation.

Services recognise that people can be particularly at risk of not having their needs met when they are being discharged from one service to another, for example from an acute setting back to the community, or in the case of a child, transitioning between services or families. People also have the right to make choices that may be considered risky or unwise, as long as there is a sensible balance between their individual needs and preferences and their own, and others, safety.

5. Community-based

A person receiving care and support services, is enabled to be part of and is included in the community. This means services are designed to ensure a person can live in their home or a home-like environment and maintains meaningful relations with their family, friends and wider community, wherever they live.
Social services should support people to be independent for longer, in their own homes and localities and staff advise people and where appropriate, family members or carers, of the supports that are available to them within and outside the service to meet their needs and to support their individual wellbeing.

Where appropriate the service involves people close to the person and supports them in their potential role of informal carers. Services are provided in the local community enabling people to overcome or manage any condition, disability, or life difficulties they may face within their communities. People are not segregated; they are seen as co-producers of their care and they are not treated in blocs.

6. Well-managed

There is an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning and improvement, shared by all managers and staff. Managers proactively support staff and collaborate with partners to deliver care and support. There are effective governance and management systems in place. Information about risks, performance and outcomes is used effectively to improve care. Information on care quality inspections results and advice for improvement are publicly available and presented in a transparent and accessible way. Accountability for quality of the service is clearly defined, and people are informed on how they can provide feedback on the quality of their care.

Well-managed services organise and manage their workforce to ensure they have the right staff with the required skills, flexibility, and experience to respond effectively to the needs of people for whom they provide care and support. Qualified and healthy workforce whose well-being and safety is taken into account, are supported through a positive culture of supervision and encouraged to develop new skills through training. Providers of services can work in a relationship of trust with inspection agencies and public authorities.

Future Steps

These principles will guide the future formulation of the framework standards, which will be co-created with our members throughout the year 2024. Finally, ESN will work with members to come up with indicators that will help practitioners measure compliance with the standards. For both, standards and indicators will also seek the views of persons using social services, so we can come up in 2025 with a framework consisting of principles, standards and indicators that becomes a reference for quality social services in Europe.